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Amir, M. (2017). Revisiting Politicide: State Annihilation in Israel/Palestine. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 5(4), 368-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2016.1231630>

Published in:
Territory, Politics, Governance

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Territory, Politics, Governance* on [date of publication], available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/21622671.2016.1231630>

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Revisiting Politicide: State Annihilation in Israel/Palestine

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ABSTRACT

State annihilation is a persistent concern in Israel/Palestine. While the specter of Israel's destruction increasingly haunts Israeli public political debates, the actual materialization of Palestinian statehood seems to be permanently suspended, caught in an ever-protracted process of state-building. The current paper claims that to understand the unfolding of the discursive formations, as well as the spatial dimensions of conflict and control in Israel/Palestine, we should explicate the workings of the processes of politicide. Politicide, in this regard, denotes the eradication of the political existence of a group and sabotaging the turning of a community of people into a polity. This analysis suggests that the insistence that the State of Israel is under threat of extinction should be understood as a speech act, a performative reiteration, which allows for the securitization of Israeli rule in the occupied Palestinian territory, a securitization which then serves to rationalize the ongoing concrete politicide of the Palestinians. Elaborating on the concept of politicide, and diverging from defining it solely through the use of brute violence, this examination suggests that what is often overlooked in discussions of politicide are the seemingly more benign means of its implementation, the micro-power mechanisms of spatial control, prohibitions and regulations.

Merav Amir (2016), "Revisiting politicide: state annihilation in Israel/Palestine", *Territory, Politics, Governance*, DOI: 10.1080/21622671.2016.1231630

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The political battle for statehood between Israel and the Palestinians has been haunted for decades by the prospect, real or imagined, of state annihilation. Despite the prevalence of alternative visions prior to the 1948 war (Azoulay, 2014), the establishment of the State of Israel has construed these conditions of enmity as a zero-sum game, hinged on the logic of non-recognition. Both sides have repudiated the principle statehood rights of their counterpart, as well as their conflicting territorial demands (Gelvin, 2014). These premises underwent fundamental transformations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This first changed in 1988 when the Palestine Liberation Organization declared itself reconciled with the existence of the State of Israel (PLO, 2016), but it was not until the Oslo Accords of 1993 that this declaration was formally acknowledged by the Israeli leadership and was reciprocally answered with an Israeli recognition of the Palestinians' rights for statehood. Thus, for all intents and purposes, the Oslo Accords were a game-changer in this regard and should have rendered the question of the annihilation of either state obsolete. Yet, delving below the surface of formal declarations, a more complex picture emerges. As the historical existential threat to the existence of the State of Israel seems to plague Israeli politics, and the actual establishment of the Palestinian state is perpetually deferred, the potential or actual spectacle of annihilation of either political entity dominates regional politics.

Talk of state annihilation conjures up images of grand military forces sweeping over foreign territory, and of death and destruction of great magnitude. However, in this paper I want to suggest that the deliberate and systematic eradication of aspirations for statehood is not necessarily materialized through

the use of extensive acts of brute force, it can, at times, be manifested through less spectacular means. To provide an account of these processes, which are often more subtle and intricate, this paper focuses on the concept of *politicide*. Following the definition of this concept provided by Uradyn Bulag (2010), who elaborates on its use by Baruch Kimmerling (2003), *politicide* refers to “the destruction of the capacity to produce or reproduce a polity with the eventual aim of eliminating the ‘political identity’ of an ethnic group” (p. 431). Bulag thus distances the meaning of *politicide* from its articulation by scholars of genocide studies such as Barbara Harff (2005), who sees *politicide* as a sub-set of genocide. For Bulag, *politicide* does not refer to mass killings, but to a wide spectrum of processes, ranging from the social and cultural to the military, which are intended to deny communities of people the possibility of realizing their aspirations for self-determination, thus destroying their political and national existence.

Despite its broad potential applicability, the concept of *politicide* has not received much scholarly attention thus far. This paper therefore aims to revisit this concept, and sets out on a double endeavor. First, it claims that the conceptual framework of *politicide* provides us with a fresh look at the processes which dominate regional politics in Israel/Palestine. The main thrust of this paper is dedicated to analyzing this assertion. Through this examination, this paper also aims to demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of *politicide* for political analysis. Elaborating on the concept of *politicide* beyond its articulation by Bulag and Kimmerling, I will claim that this concept particularly calls for a space-centred analysis. The centrality of a spatial analysis becomes apparent when considering the triad constellation of state-sovereignty-territory, which the international state-system dictates. Attempts at *politicide*

may be seen as being driven by the idea of territorial exclusivity which statehood entails, as the modern state is intrinsically tied to an imagined sovereign space, coherent, well-defined and exclusively controlled (Agnew, 1994; 2009). Consequently, the congruence of sovereignty and territory, and the unfeasibility of overlapping sovereignties, may be found to act as driving factors for policies of politicide when competing territorial claims are at stake. Most evidently, therefore, in these analyses space is pivotal in the search for the motivations for politicide. However, spatial analysis should not merely be seen as providing explanatory factors. As national aspirations for statehood materialize through spatial manifestations, so do policies aimed to eliminate these aspirations depend on the ability to control and manipulate space. Effective policies of politicide should therefore be seen as gaining their efficacy through spatial means. Thus, the analysis provided here demonstrates the pivotal role of space-center examination for understanding the unfolding of politicidal practices and policies.

Critical analysis of the Israeli regime and its forms of domination over the Palestinians has often retorted to labelling this regime as settler colonialism, as an ethnocracy, and even predicated on the principles of apartheid (cf. Gregory, 2004; Yiftachel, 2006; Ram, 2007; Ghanim, 2008; Rashed & Short, 2012; Salamanca et al, 2012; Veracini, 2013; Yiftachel, 2015). Examining the policies of the Israeli regime through the concept of politicide is not an attempt to expand this exercise of name-calling, or to question the applicability of any of these terms. Yet, as surely all of these scholars would be quick to agree, none of these terms provides a comprehensive picture. The conceptual framework of settler colonialism, for instance, is adequate for explaining the history of Zionism, and current Israeli policies in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and in

Israel proper, but falls short in attempting to explicate Israel's policies in the Gaza Strip. Similarly, the concept of ethnocracy is useful in deciphering Israeli forms of governing its citizen population, Jews and Palestinians alike, but is perhaps less equipped to explain the particular configurations of rule exercised by Israel on its population of Palestinian non-citizens. The term apartheid is often used polemically, or is narrated in a cautionary tale when political processes in Israel are described as leading to creeping apartheid. Thus, the focus on politicide allows the provision of a comprehensive rationale for what sometimes seems like contradictory and incoherent policies and decisions, as well as the highlighting of some of the interconnectivities between diverse processes. Moreover, as politicide is not only manifested materially (primarily through spatial control), but also shapes discursive configurations, it allows one to expose the manner in which space and discourse are interwoven in intricate ways.

By providing a spatial analysis, and by focusing on the material conditions for state-formation, the examination of the configurations of Israeli rule over the Palestinians reaches beyond a discussion restricted to a focus on declarations of leaders, diplomatic maneuvering and on the politics of the peace talks. Yet, discussion of the threat of the politicide of Israel is often brushed aside in research, as no more than a rhetorical ploy, a transparent attempt to manipulate local and international public opinion. In the analysis that follows, I will suggest that even as such, the constant referral to the pending politicide of Israel is a performative speech act which does not only have a significant role to play in the discursive formations of the conflict, but, more importantly, is instrumental in the actual policies of Palestinian politicide executed by Israel. The focus on politicide, therefore, permits tying together these diverse

processes and exposing their interconnectivity. For this purpose, the following two sections focus on politicide as a central theme around which Israeli political discourses are organized. The third section of this paper provides a spatial analysis of the actual politicidal policies which Israel implements in the occupied Palestinian territory. By bringing these two facets together, we can, consequently, see how the reconfiguration of space and of the ability to make use of that space, has turned into a weapon in the war Israel is waging against the Palestinian political struggle for independence. It also shows how this war is configured to be intrinsically tied to the discursive formations of Israeli public discourses which are being rearranged around the theme of the supposedly looming destruction of the State of Israel. Thus, the interweaving of the two processes through the concept of politicide does not only highlight how this thematic connection provides a ready avenue of self-justification for Israeli actions, but also exposes their interdependent dynamics.

THE HIGH POLITICS OF POLITICIDE IN ISRAEL

Historical aims to rid it notwithstanding, the existence of the State of Israel has long been a well-established fact. In its first decades it was the coalition of the Arab nations intent on doing away with the newly-formed state which posed the most immediate threat to its existence. However, this coalition has long disintegrated and no longer poses a real threat to Israel's existence (Harkabi & Friedman, 1989). Moreover, in addition to being the only state to have nuclear weapons in the Middle East, Israel maintains a US-funded military which is one of the strongest and most advanced internationally.¹ Thus, militarily there are no external enemies that can actually bring about its end. Moreover, despite

Israelis' views to the contrary, the Israeli state enjoys unwavering international diplomatic backing by world hegemonic powers (Reinharz & Rabinovich, 2007). And yet, the political discourse in Israel is increasingly dominated by the scare of extinction. As most Israelis, in addition to living through what is often perceived as an unresolvable violent conflict, have had to endure a sharp increase in social disparities, internal rifts and dramatically decreasing economic possibilities for the (shrinking) middle and (growing) lower classes since the early 2000's (Sheferman, 2009), the deferral of the looming destruction of the Israeli state seems to be the best that Israeli politicians have to offer their voters. Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party's 2015 election campaign, which resulted in a landslide victory, was mostly based on scare-tactics concerning Israel's obliteration (Klein, 2015; NYT Editorial Board, 2015; Prusher, 2015; Tarnopolsky, 2015; Tharoor, 2015). Evoking the threat of extinction is not unique to Israel; it is a well-worn manipulation to counter any internal political challenges and oppositions, which has been extensively used by political leaders in many historical and geopolitical contexts. However, in Israel, this tactic increasingly dominates the political discourse, not only during a time of elections.

Beyond the usefulness of this scare tactic for the Israeli conservative leadership, there are other, underlying, aspects to the persistence of this issue. Israeli political leaders repeatedly refer to any act of resistance by the Palestinians, no matter how minute, as posing an existential threat to Israel. Even non-violent resistance is immediately labelled as an act of terror: the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) on Israel has been dubbed 'economic terror' (cf. Benari, 2013); attempts to convince the UN to recognize the establishment of a Palestinian State has been called 'diplomatic terror' (cf. Keinon, 2012); and

appeals to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, and even to the Israeli High Court of Justice, to consider Israel's violations of international law have been labelled 'legal terror' (cf. Zarchin, 2009). All of these forms of 'terror' are then identified as presenting an existential threat to the Israeli state, as they are framed as campaigns of 'delegitimization'. The labelling of such campaigns as delegitimization efforts aims, in fact, to delegitimize these very campaigns, as it disassociates them from struggles for freedom, for human rights or for historical justice, and associates them with attempts to eliminate the Israeli state: "Delegitimization negates the right of the Jewish people to live in a sovereign democratic and Jewish state in the historic homeland of the Jewish people (modern day Israel)" (JFNA, 2015). Thus, according to this framing, Palestinian resistance, be it violent or non-violent, is never a response to the ongoing Israeli occupation and oppression; rather, it is always already aimed at bringing an end to the State of Israel.² It is obvious that neither teenagers armed with pocketknives, nor cultural and academic boycotts, nor even unguided missiles launched from Gaza or the occasional suicide bomber can bring about Israel's doom. However, the persistency of this issue discloses something else, precisely due to its evident refutability, and not merely the extent of hyperbolic talk which characterizes Israeli politics.

Presenting Israel as having to deal with a constant threat of extinction serves Israel's conservative elites in sustaining the status-quo. Most significantly, it is instrumental to Israeli political leadership in counteracting demands, both internally and externally, for holding it accountable for the lack of a political resolution to the conflict, and allows it to deflect criticism concerning its responsibility for the stalemate in the everlasting peace negotiations. Moreover, portraying every act of aggression or even resistance by the Palestinians as

posing an existential threat to the State of Israel is key for maintaining the illusion of a bilateral conflict. Thus, claiming that the threat to Israeli existence is integral to the current conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, as Israeli political leaders often do, is essential to the insistence on representing Israeli and Palestinians as two sides in a (somewhat imbalanced, yet) symmetric conflict. This insistence feeds the victimization discourse in Israel and aids in masking the reality of the actual power relations, of Israel's status as a regional military superpower and its overwhelming domination over the Palestinians.

Beyond retaining the illusion of a symmetric conflict, insistence on the looming politicide of Israel serves additional political goals. Claiming that the Palestinians are, in fact, harboring the wish to do away with the State of Israel suggests that the solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict cannot be reached by ending the Israeli occupation. Thus, rather than seeing the political solution to the conflict as redressing the situation created in 1967, as agreed upon in the Oslo Accords, this perspective claims that the Palestinians see the conflict in the context of 1948. Israeli advocates of this stance therefore claim that since the Palestinians are secretly holding on to the desire to roll back the clock to a period before the Israeli state was established, there can never be a real and sincere political resolution to the conflict that falls short of dismantling the State of Israel. However, the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling (2003) suggests that in actuality, the insistence of Israeli politicians that the politicide of Israel looms close serves an even more sinister objective. Kimmerling claims that folded into this perspective is a semi-acknowledged desire on the part of Israelis, which is increasingly gaining legitimacy in Israeli mainstream political discourse, also to go back to 1948. The return to 1948 in this discourse is not aimed at the undoing of the Israeli state; quite the contrary, it wishes to reenact

the historic moment of state formation and to harness its 'constituent violence' (Benjamin, 1986) once again. However, the wish is to use this violence, this time round, to fully accomplish what was done only partially then. Thus, according to Kimmerling, this talk of the pending Israeli politicide is used, in actuality, by Israeli politicians to gradually legitimize a plan to ethnically cleanse the entire area of the Land of Israel (historical Palestine) of Palestinians (Kimmerling, 2003, 150).

POLITICIDE IN ISRAELI PUBLIC DISCOURSE

It is very clear how the constant re-evoking of Israeli politicide serves the interests of the conservative Israeli political elites in their promotion of particular political agendas, yet, it is less obvious why it gains such resonance among the Jewish-Israeli public. To be sure, for Jewish-Israelis the threat of extinction, political and/or otherwise, must be understood in the context of the historic trauma of the holocaust. More accurately: the role of this historic memory in the shaping of Jewish national identity cannot be overstated. It is not only that this memory haunts Jewish national identity, but it is also very much connected, historically and thematically, to the establishment of the State of Israel. While Jewish national aspirations for statehood preceded the holocaust by more than half a century, the actual establishment of the State of Israel, and the international support its establishment gained, is directly connected to this act of genocide. Moreover, Israel is often depicted as the remedy for any and all attempts to target Jews once again. By making this connection explicit, the liquidation of the State of Israel is closely tied to the scare of extermination for Jewish-Israelis. The fact that, as Israelis scholars are

quick to remind us, the memory of the holocaust is often abused by political leaders for their own political gains (cf. Zuckermann, 1988; 2001; Zertal, 2005) should not be seen as diminishing the role of the holocaust in the Jewish-Israeli imagination; quite the contrary. While feeding the collective anxiety, these blunt manipulations sustain their efficacy particularly due to the vividness of this historic extermination, as the memory of the holocaust is woven into the national identity of Jewish-Israelis through the education system, as well as by other apparatuses of state indoctrination (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999; Dror, 2001; Resnik, 2003). Thus, in the Israeli public discourse, the memory of the holocaust fuels talk of Israeli politicide with a readily accessible threat of extermination (Klar et al, 2013).

Obviously, the Jewish-Israeli public is not simply the passive recipient of the manipulative use of the historic memory of the holocaust by its political leaders and, once again, the conflating of Israeli politicide with this historic atrocity serves to justify current-day aggression towards the Palestinians. To an extent, in a post-traumatic vain, any and all acts of (Palestinian) resistance to Israel automatically evoke notions of (Nazi) extermination, as if it were happening in the here and now. Thus, any measure to stifle resistance is necessarily seen as a justifiable act of defense, no matter how disproportionate or unwarranted. Yet, more importantly, seeing themselves as the ultimate historic victims of persecution grants Jewish-Israelis moral exoneration from their own present-day wrong-doings.

Talk of Israeli politicide (amplified through its re-contextualization as a new holocaust) does not merely serve Jewish-Israelis' self-justification for the acts of aggression towards the Palestinians committed by their elected governments; to best understand its additional roles, we should examine how

future-oriented political thinking has been reshaped in this discourse since the early 2000s. While reiteration of the commitment by consecutive Israeli governments to the two-state solution indeed helps to deflect criticism of Israel in the international political arena, the notion of a two-state resolution to the conflict has carried very little weight in internal Israeli politics since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2001. Since then, repeated surveys have shown that while many Jewish-Israelis still declare that they wish Israel would reach a political agreement with the Palestinians, and would be willing to accept the two-state solution as the end-point of that process, an overwhelming majority of them do not believe that reaching this agreement is at all viable (Gaon, 2014). Consequently, all talk of allowing the Palestinians to establish an independent state is associated with the ever shrinking left-leaning Israeli peace camp and is defined as politicide (as a form of personal political suicide) for any mainstream politician aspiring to be elected. Presumably, the fact that this positive political future is fast fading, and no other is in sight, could have dragged Israel into the rabbit hole of political nihilism. Absurd as it may seem, I would like to claim that, in this sense, the allusion to Israeli politicide serves to save the Israeli political debate from itself. In this political environment, the persistent talk of the (supposed) looming end to Israel, should be seen as the negative pole in future-oriented thinking, in the absence of an alternative positive horizon. Thus, in lieu of constructive forward-thinking programs, the Israeli political debate clings to competing plans for preventing Israel's doom. In other words, for a society which is consumed by conflict, in which no positive image of a conflict-free future may be envisioned (short of all-out-war), prospects are articulated through a negative image of what should be avoided at all costs.

Ostensibly, to avoid this extremely pessimistic strand of politics, all that Israelis have to do is to regain their faith in reaching a historic peace agreement with the Palestinians, an agreement that is assumed to follow the two-state solution in one form or another. Why is it that much of the Israeli public seems to repudiate what to an outsider may seem as the only sane and accessible resolution of this bloody conflict? While some analysts tend to assume that, exhausted by decades of war and terror, Israeli public opinion has been corrupted by blunt manipulations of conservative hardliners (cf. Gaon, 2014), there may be another way of looking at this. To understand this, we should take a closer look at the political reality in Israel/Palestine. Many leading analysts and researchers of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have already reached the conclusion that dividing the territory of historic Palestine into two states is no longer a realistic option, and this solution cannot be realized, even with the best of intentions (cf. Benvenisti, 1984; Jamal, 2001; Beinun et al, 2006; Farouk-Alli, 2007; El-Hasan, 2010; Faris, 2013; O'Malley, 2015). The fact that as of 2016, almost 10% of the Jewish-Israeli population is living in occupied territory, the disproportionate political representation of the settlers in Israeli corridors of power, the ever-growing co-dependency of the Palestinian and Israeli economies and, in particular, the dependence of Israel on natural resources extracted from the occupied area (including water aquifers, quarries and land reserves), the internal and seemingly irreparable rifts in Palestinian politics and the rise of Islamic Palestinian fundamentalism, have all been sighted in this literature as each being a sufficient cause for precluding the coming into being of a Palestinian state. Consequently, since Israel is the de-facto sovereign of the entire area, rather than seeing the realization of the two-state solution as temporarily pending, a more accurate depiction would be to describe Israel as

a binational state stretching across the entire region of historic Palestine, in which the Palestinian residents are deprived of their full civic rights and protections (Bakan & Abu-Laban, 2010; Benvenisti, 2010; Azoulay & Ophir, 2012; Yiftachel, 2015). As stated by Miron Benvenisti (2010): “in the absence of any political process, a de-facto binational structure, was willy-nilly, entrenched” (ibid). And it seems as though on some fundamental level, the Israeli public is already very much aware of this fact.

As the realization that the two-state solution is no longer a pragmatic option is gradually taking hold, the prospect of the one state is not perceived as plausible by most Jewish-Israelis, since the forming of a single state in the entire area of historic Palestine may only amount to one of two alternatives. Provided that full civic rights are granted to all residents of this area, Jewish-Israelis would quickly find themselves as a minority in a predominantly Palestinian state.³ Any attempt to avoid this inevitable outcome that would fall short of providing the Palestinians with full civic rights, would spell out the formulization and the codification of the (existing) de-facto apartheid, and would not be accepted internationally. Therefore, Jewish legal, social and cultural privilege is what is perceived as being at risk if this binational structure materializes in formal politics, since once the Jewish majority is jeopardized, this state, called Israel or by any other name, would no longer be defined as Jewish. Thus, in this regard, when the demolition of the State of Israel is imagined, what is actually lamented is the presumed revoking of this privilege. Yet, we should remember that, as aforementioned, in the national Jewish imagery, the identity of the State of Israel as a Jewish state cannot be understood as disassociated from the role Israel plays in the prevention of the next holocaust. In this context, Jewish supremacy in Israel is perceived by Jewish Israelis as intrinsically linked to the

very real survival of the Jewish people. Consequently, as more and more Israelis are disillusioned by the two-state political solution, the only alternative future that is readily accessible to them is not simply undesirable, but is actually seen as that which should be avoided at all costs, as it imagined as bringing about their doom.

Moreover, to understand what else is at stake it is important to remember that the state, any state for that matter, is an abstract construct which is malleable and open for appropriation, manipulation and conflicting interpretations by the ruling powers. Adi OPHIR (2010) claims that the state should be understood as a non-tenable entity which is mainly used for fostering, often violently, the manufacturing of cohesion, unity, homogeneity and boundedness. Additionally, the state is the means through which a ruling power performs closure: “In more general terms it may be shown that in every field and sphere displaying power relations, domination, control, and intervention, the juridico-political apparatus of sovereignty is entrusted with the closure of these relations within the state as a particularizing whole” (p. 79). For nation-states, this closure is attained first and foremost through the nation, as the historic origins of the state (p. 93). Imagining that the state is in peril, therefore, does not only allow for intensified processes of ‘border-control’, but to reasserting the natural and seemingly obvious connection between the nation and the state. When in actuality, separation is no longer possible and can hardly be justified, and when Jews and Palestinians de-facto live in a binational state under a single sovereignty (albeit with very highly differential relations to this ruling power), the insistence that Israel is on the verge of being annihilated appears to be one of the few remaining venues for portraying Israel as congruent with the Jewish-Israeli nation. Since in this binational existence, the purely Jewish nation-state

which is portrayed as being in peril, is long gone (if it ever existed), buying into the scare of politicide is the only means through which Jewish-Israelis can imagine the uninterrupted unity of (Israeli) state and (Jewish) nation not only as an object of desire, but as if it were their reality at present.

THE POLITICIDE OF PALESTINE

The Oslo Accords did not only change the discursive premise of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the formal endorsing of the two-state solution by the two parties to the conflict, it also facilitated tangible processes of Palestinian state-building. Following the Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established and, with the close guidance, funding and supervision of the international community, the formal and institutional requisites of state-making processes took place (Frisch, 1998; Milton-Edwards, 1998; Jamal, 2001; Hovsepian, 2008). Thus, the Palestinian strive for independence has long passed the stage of a mere armed struggle and has taken shape through the actual formation of a proto-state in the occupied Palestinian territory. Moreover, while until 2011, the full establishment of the Palestinian state was pending the conclusions of the peace negotiations, the PA has since changed its tactics and has been actively seeking an alternative, unilateral, route for making Palestine a reality (Schell, 2011). Hence, Palestinian statehood should be understood as suspended despite all efforts of the PA and other Palestinian political actors to the contrary, and the prevention of its coming into being should be examined as actively instigated. Thus, the enduring suspension of turning this pending state into a fully-independent state merits attention, since it enable the exposing of some of the implicit and tangible conditions for state

formation which are at work in this case, when the formal requirements for statehood are, in fact, already satisfied. In what follows, I wish to decipher some of the key factors through which this active politicide is carried out.

Much of the discussion of what hinders the realization of Palestinian statehood focuses on external circumstances. In some of these debates the international alliances and the role of global political hegemonies are highlighted, while others focus on the question of how much the Palestinian proto-state is compliant with the requirements of international law (cf. Nanda et al, 1988; Boyle, 1990; Crawford, 1990; de Waart, 1994; McKinney, 1994–1995; Becker, 1998; Silverberg, 1998; Quigley, 2002; Goldsmith, 2003; Ronen, 2010; Quigley, 2012). By contrast, the examination provided below focuses on a spatial analysis, aiming to expose the material conditions which are at play that throttle Palestinian statehood and actively promote Palestinian politicide. Prior research has also identified the fragmentation of the Palestinian semi-autonomic rule into discrete enclaves as hindering Palestinian state formation (Gregory, 2004; Handel, 2010). Yet, as is evident from other geopolitical contexts, territorial continuity in and of itself should not be seen as a necessary condition for statehood, as there are ample international examples in which states traverse territorial fragmentation, either stretching across physical barriers (such as bodies of water), or are discontinued by other sovereign territories. Thus, it is not that spatial disunity in and of itself may explain the Palestinian predicament; rather, other factors should be seen as of consequence here, deeming this particular type of territorial disunity detrimental to the realization of sovereign independence.

Moreover, the relentless talk of the possible politicide of the State of Israel in Israeli public discourse should not be seen as independent of the actual

suppression of Palestinian political aspirations. My claim is that discussions of Israeli politicide and the actual suspension of the materialization of Palestinian political independence are not only thematically linked or need to be considered jointly for the purpose of reciprocity, but that there is a causal relationship here. In other words, the construction of Israeli politicide as a pending threat is instrumental in the execution of actual politicidal policies of the Palestinians by Israel. The linkage between the two is, not surprisingly, hinged on security. The portrayal of all Palestinian struggles aimed at realizing political aspirations as posing an existential threat to the State of Israel, as aforementioned, gives way to the securitization of Israeli political forms of domination, which work to stifle Palestinian independence. Prior research has already demonstrated the extent to which the language of security has been repeatedly used to justify any and all policies taken by Israel which suppress Palestinian freedom (cf. Hanafi, 2005; Usher, 2005; Coskum, 2008; Ghanim, 2008; Amir, 2011; Gordon, 2011; Whitaker, 2011; Azoulay & Ophir, 2012). From the perspective provided here, we can make this claim more precise. Israeli security policies should not merely be understood as presented, as safeguarding Israelis against Palestinian aggression; rather, they are explained as if they were counteracting attempts of Israeli politicide. They are, therefore, construed as intrinsically linked to the survival of the State of Israel and, due to the discursive implication of the memory of the holocaust into this construction, also to the survival of the Jewish nation as a whole. From this perspective, no measure, no policy, no extent of human strife these policies entail seem too outrageous or extreme, as they are all justified a-priori, since it is all rationalised as if what is at stake is nothing short of the national and physical survival of the Jews and of the Jewish nation.

Seen from this perspective, we can now examine the measures of control which Israel employs in the occupied territory. The blockade which Israel imposes over the Gaza Strip, for instance, renders this area subordinate to Israeli control, despite its presumed autonomy. Similarly, the policies which Israel implements in the West Bank through its checkpoint regime negate the ability of Palestinian self-governance. While both forms of control are explained as derivatives of security considerations, despite ample evidence to the contrary, in what follows I suggest that examined together it becomes evident that these policies are oriented towards obstructing Palestinian political aspirations.

Blockading the Gaza Strip

At first glance, it would seem as though claiming that Israel is implementing policies which sever Palestinian political independence in Gaza may be perceived as counterintuitive. The withdrawal of Israeli forces, the dismantling of the settlements and the severing of almost all social, personal and commercial connections between Gaza and Israel by increasingly limiting the movement of people and goods between Israel and the Strip, have been repeatedly highlighted by Israel as marking the end of Israeli control over the Strip and its residents. Indeed, the 2005 Disengagement Plan was perceived at the time by some as a positive step towards Palestinian independence (Efrat, 2006; Golan, 2008; Rynhold & Waxman, 2008). However, in actuality, the Disengagement laid the foundations for rendering this presumed independence to be a failure. By not only imposing severe restrictions on the movement of people and merchandise between its territory and the Strip, but also with the rest of the world, Israel turned the closure into a fully-fledge blockade and laid the foundations for completely isolating this region. Halting all traffic through

Gaza's seaport and implementing a full maritime siege, destroying Gaza's only airport and maintaining absolute aerial control and imposing strict control over all its overland crossings (not only those on the boundary with Israel, but also, by proxy, over the Rafah crossing bordering Egypt, see: Bashi & Mann, 2007), this closure has turned the Gaza Strip into one of the most isolated areas on earth.⁴

To date, almost a decade later, the closure of the Strip means that but for exceptional occasions, the entrance and exit of Gaza residents is rare and sporadic and is dependent on obtaining scanty-issued permits by Israel, the entrance of Israeli and West Bank residents is completely forbidden and the entrance of foreigners is mostly restricted to aid workers and members of official delegations (Gisha, 2016). The blockade of Gaza is detrimental for the more than 1.5 million residents of the Strip, who are trapped within one of the most densely occupied territories in the world. The strict restrictions that Israel has been imposing on the movement of people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip stifle any attempts at the economic development of the Strip, to the extent that its soaring unemployment has exceeded international records (UNCTAD secretariat, 2015), and the majority of its residents are dependent on external aid to avoid starvation (World Bank, 2015). The implications of the blockade reach well beyond the economic ruination of the Strip. The blockade of the Gaza Strip does not only rob its residents of their livelihoods, it cuts off the residents of the Strip from their next of kin, their social relations and communities, many of which are in the West Bank, Israel and East Jerusalem (Bashi & Diamond, 2015), and it also has arrested the educational, professional and personal development of Gazans for almost a decade to date. In particular, it renders the lives of Gaza's youth desperate, as it deprives them for any hope for the future

(Roy, 2015). Moreover, for some, the ongoing blockade literally spells death, as the inability to leave the Strip deprives them of access to life-saving medical treatment which is not available in Gaza's strained medical system (WHO, 2014). The devastating effects of the blockade, both social and economic, have been adequately documented and analyzed by human rights organizations, by investigative journalists, as well as by prior research (cf. Li, 2006; Collins, 2008; Sharp, 2008; Hass, 2009; Associated Press, 2010; Gisha, 2010b; 2010a; Handel, 2010; PHR-Israel, 2011; Roy, 2011; Gisha, 2012; McCloskey, 2012; Rubinstein, 2012; Beaumont & Balousha, 2014; WHO, 2014; Davidovich, 2015; Etkes & Zimring, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Oxfam, 2015; Winter, 2015).

Since the 2005 Disengagement, the official Israeli stance is that it should no longer be considered an occupier of the Gaza Strip, and that the Strip is independently ruled by the Palestinians, a stance which has been ratified by the Israeli Supreme Court (MFA, 2008). Moreover, the declaration of the Gaza Strip as "hostile territory" (PM Office, 2007), in response to the Hamas takeover in 2007, stressing the enmity between the Israeli and the Gazan governments, was aimed at underscoring the status of Gaza as external and independent of Israel. The validity of these claims has been challenged by an array of legal experts claiming that as long as Israel maintains its spatial control over the perimeters of the Strip, it is still the de-facto occupier of the area (cf. Bruderlein, 2004; Aronson, 2005; Bashi & Mann, 2007; B'Tselem, 2016; Gross, Forthcoming). The importance of the legal debates notwithstanding, there is still merit to examining the actual political implications of the blockade. Even if we assume that a quasi-independent Palestinian rule, which falls short of full sovereignty, may be exercised in Gaza, despite Israel maintaining its control over the Strip's boundaries, it is important to note that the blockade Israel

enforces is structured to increase, rather than decrease, Gaza's dependence on Israel, a dependency which undermines the robustness of this rule in tangible ways. In her analysis of the manner in which the closure policy was implemented between its inception in 1991 and the execution of the Disengagement Plan in 2005, Sara Roy (2007) has already claimed that it should be seen as contradictory in nature. Rather than understanding this policy as a means for increasing the levels of separation between Israel and the Gaza Strip, these means should be understood as operating to increase the dependency of the residents of Gaza on Israel, economically as well as administratively. For this aim, she shows how the forms of de-development that were implemented by Israeli rule over the Strip throughout this period ensured that this area would not be able to become self-sustaining or to be freed from its dependence on Israel. These forms of obstructing independent development were never reversed, rather, they have only become more substantial as the closure has tightened and turned into a full-fledged blockade. For instance, the implemented closure obstructed the ability of industry in Gaza to sustain itself, due to restrictions on the flow of raw materials into the Strip and on the transport of products from the Strip, ensuring the dependence of Gaza on imports from Israel. Similarly, the closure also enabled the forestallment, destruction or prevention of developing infrastructure projects. This entailed an increasing reliance of Strip residents on Israel for the provision of water, electricity, gas and other essential needs for the sustainment of the mundane aspects of living.

The closure in the earlier years, and the subsequent blockade, were both rationalized in the language of security. The presumed threat that the Palestinians pose to Israel's existence explains the highly restrictive policies and

the forms of spatial control Israel exercises. However, this assertion is questionable at best. High-ranking officers in the Israeli army repeatedly claim that the blockade is doing more harm than good to Israel's security (Lewis, 2015), and prominent Israeli cabinet members have also admitted that the blockade falls short of reaching both its security and political aims (Bennett, 2016). However, by ensuring almost complete dependence on the provisions allowed in by Israel for maintaining its bare sustenance, Israel implements a policy of control by proxy, as Israel leverages its ability to regulate the flow in and out of the Strip to pressure the Palestinians to concede to its political agendas. Similarly, Israel's control over the Palestinian population registry dictates an administrative dependency. Thus, for instance, as Israel does not allow Palestinians to change their place of residence, people cannot permanently move from Gaza to the West Bank and vice versa. The registering of Palestinian births and deaths, the issuing of passports and travel permits are all dependent on the good will and the conditioned willingness of Israel to comply.

Very generally we can see that the presumed independence granted to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip was predisposed to be doomed from the onset. As the establishment of independent rule is challenging in the most favorable of conditions, it stood little chance when construed on a defunct economy, constantly on the brink of humanitarian disaster, and in relation to a socially deflated population. The Palestinian population in Gaza is not only internationally isolated, but also cut off from its familial, communal and national ties. These ties stretch into Israel proper and the neighboring countries, but are most significant in the West Bank population. The violent military attacks which Israel performs periodically in the Strip, reaching ever-

increasing levels of death and ruination with every round, only exacerbate the stress and trauma of an already devastated society. The severe limitations on the flow of essential building materials forestall the reconstruction of the Strip. As large areas lay in ruin, many residents find themselves displaced within the Strip itself for years on end. Moreover, we should keep in mind that this presumed independence is a far cry from Palestinian national aspirations, as it is granted on the condition of the disassociation of the Strip from the West Bank. Deprived of having even the most basic control over its boundaries and airspace, provisioned on conditions which are set to undermine its viability to begin with, this alleged independence, is established along the contours of a failed state. An analysis of the Hamas regime and the political circumstances in Gaza, and the question as to whether this failure has actually been realized, is beyond the scope of the present discussion; the examination herein confines itself to looking at what Israeli policies have actually been geared to produce. In this regard, we can see that the conditions in Gaza have been designed to engender a premeditated failure. This failure, I claim, has broader political implications. We can see that Israel's insistence that Gaza is indeed independent is aimed to demarcate this failure as a precursor of a larger, pending, failure, that of a more general Palestinian independence. Thus, the inability of the Palestinians to realize the impossible, and to create and sustain a viable and flourishing mini-state in the contours of the Gaza Strip, is often used by Israeli state representatives as a case study of a sort. Gaza as a failure is aimed to demonstrate the Palestinians' principle un-readiness for full and independent statehood. In this regard, the blockade of Gaza should not only be understood as facilitating the inability to realize Palestinian political

independence in Gaza itself, but should also be understood as an instrumental factor in the construing of Palestinian politicide more generally.

The Defragmentation of the West Bank

The reconfiguration of space and restrictions on movement are also at the core of Israeli control over the West Bank and, like in the Gaza Strip, these should be understood as instrumental in the engendering of Palestinian politicide. However, in the West Bank these facets of Israeli rule are manifested in configurations which differ significantly than those implemented in the Gaza Strip. In fact, it would be more precise to describe the ruling configurations implemented by Israel in Gaza as diametrically opposed to those applied in the West Bank. This opposition is neither incidental nor inconsequential and should be understood as also playing a central role in Palestinian politicide.⁵ In the West Bank, which, unlike Gaza, is still dotted with close to one hundred settlements and has strong military presence, Israel operates dozens of military checkpoints for monitoring and limiting Palestinian movement. Like the blockade on Gaza, these checkpoints are explained by Israel as merely there to serve security purposes, aimed at preventing the carrying out of attacks by Palestinians. “I tell the soldiers that they are protecting their homes and families; we drive home that message all the time” says lieutenant colonel Gil Mamon, a battalion commander of the Military Police, whose soldiers are manning West Bank checkpoints (quoted in Lappin, 2015). However, in 2008 a group of retired Israeli generals, including Ilan Paz, who was the first to set up checkpoints in the West Bank during the Second Intifada, claimed that the checkpoints do more harm than good when it comes to ensuring the security of Israelis (Copans, 2008). Accordingly, research has demonstrated that the

actual contribution of the checkpoints to Israel's security is questionable at best (Byman, 2011; Longo et al, 2014). Operating under the cloak of security, the actual political effects of the checkpoints are very tangible. The checkpoints fragment Palestinian space in the West Bank into small isolated enclaves, rendering all movement between these enclaves subject to the checking procedures and irregular activity of these checkpoints. The harsh effects of the checkpoints on all aspects of Palestinian life in the West Bank have been reviewed at length by prior research (Hass, 2002; Jamoul, 2004; Migdal, 2004; Erlanger, 2005; Hanafi, 2005; Zeedani, 2005; Hass, 2006; B'Tselem, 2007; Kotef & Amir, 2007; Weizman, 2007; Wigoder, 2007; Ghanim, 2008; Batniji et al, 2009; Handel, 2009; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Tawil-Souri, 2009; Kotef & Amir, 2011; Azoulay & Ophir, 2012).

As aforementioned, elsewhere I have already explicated extensively on how the West Bank checkpoints, and the limitations on Palestinian movement, serve to stifle the vitality of an independent Palestinian political entity (Amir, 2013). To reiterate in short, this fragmentation of Palestinian space and hindrances on Palestinian movement does not only carry dire implications for the people living in this space and for the ability of the Palestinian economy to recover, but is also the principal impediment to the establishment of a viable Palestinian political entity in the West Bank. However, stating that the checkpoints hinder Palestinian political development is not the same as claiming that the checkpoints serve an overt Israeli policy of politicide, since obstructing the establishment of an independent Palestinian political entity may be the side effect of policies oriented elsewhere. To claim that the operation of the checkpoints does amount to a blunt policy of politicide would demand identifying patterns of activity which cannot be interpreted as serving any other

purpose. In this regard, I suggest that there is one factor, one element in the operation of the checkpoints that may only be attributed to a deliberate attempt at politicide, and that element is their excessiveness. The excessiveness of the checkpoints is not only manifested through their density (as of December of 2015 there were 542 checkpoints, roadblocks and other movement obstacles in the West Bank, an area which is smaller than the state of Delaware) (MEMO, 2016), but also in the way in which they operate, as I demonstrate shortly.

A close examination of the ways in which Palestinian movement within the West Bank is managed provides a picture of a movement-regulatory system gone astray. Any and all movement of persons and goods between the different enclaves in the West Bank is subjected to restrictions and limitations posed by Israeli forces. Even if the checkpoints are explained as serving security purposes, the excessiveness that is part and parcel of the operation of the checkpoints cannot be rationalized to that end. Often, this excessiveness is seen as no more than a form of abuse and harassment that Israel imposes on the West Bank Palestinian population, yet my claim is that it should be understood as a key factor in the undermining of the political vitality of Palestinian rule and in ensuring that it remain deprived of any actual political power. The intensity of Israeli means of regulating Palestinian movement renders any type of Palestinian rule subordinate to Israeli control. Thus, the de-facto hold that Israeli authorities have over the Palestinian population negates any formal or de-jure demesne that any other governance would have over this same population. This is not to claim that there are no other governing apparatuses in place; both the PA and a large number of non-governmental organizations participate in the governance of different aspects of Palestinian life in the West

Bank (Hammami, 2000). However, they all function within the limitations set by Israel and are very much dependent on it.

As aforementioned, the West Bank checkpoints and the besiegement of Gaza are both explained by Israel as necessary security means for battling Palestinian terror. However, looking at these measures it quickly becomes apparent that even for security means, they seem extreme. Confining the almost two million residents of Gaza to the narrow and highly dense stretch of land of the Strip for over a decade to date, with no end in sight, or depriving the freedom of movement for all Palestinian West Bank residents, and imposing the daily abuse and humiliation that come with having to constantly go through checkpoints, do not seem like adequate responses to the presumed threat that Palestinian terror may pose for Israelis. All of this indeed may seem disproportionate; no matter how high the motivation for violent resistance among the occupied population is perceived to be, nobody seems to suggest that with the meager means at their disposal Palestinians can actually cause more than peripheral harm to Israelis. What allows for justifying the extremity of these measures is the portraying of Palestinian resistance as oriented towards attempting to liquidate the State of Israel, no matter how unfounded this claim may be. Presumably, when the threat of politicide is at stake, nothing seems to be too excessive or unjust. Yet, how can the Palestinians be portrayed as posing this kind of threat to Israel which prides itself on having one of the most highly trained and sophisticated armies in the world? To make this leap we should understand that it is not the actual means of resistance that Palestinians may deploy that is seen as posing the existential threat to the Israeli state, but, rather, the political aspirations that they encapsulate. Thus, despite all claims to the contrary, Israel still regards itself as entangled in the zero-sum game of

statehood with the Palestinians, and Palestinian independence is perceived as spelling the end of the Israeli state. This is why the forms of control which Israel deploys should be understood as aimed, first and foremost, at the politicide of Palestine. From this perspective it becomes apparent how the discursive pervasiveness of the threat to Israeli existence justifies and facilitates the actual execution of Palestinian politicide.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the configurations of Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza in this paper has demonstrated that it is movement, rather than spatial cohesion, that appears to be the determining factor for establishing an independent rulership. More particularly, it is the ability to control and regulate movement that this analysis has exposed as appearing to be at the core of political independence. The ability to control the flow of persons and goods was already identified by Michel Foucault as underlying biopolitical rule and the sustainment of governmentality (Foucault, 2007). Through this case study we can see how the undermining of autonomous control of this type of rule enables the committing of politicide and renders political independence ineffective. Thus, while debates focusing on state formation underline the sovereign aspects as prerequisites for the establishment of a state, the ability to maintain governmentalizing powers is under-theorized in this context. Yet, as the case of Palestine demonstrates, these appear as (perhaps unsatisfactory yet) necessary conditions for gaining political independence. The analysis in this paper exposed these conditions by focusing on politicide rather than of questions relating to what makes a state. The reversal of the perspective of examination,

the search for the factors which are actively interrupting the realization of political independence, instead of searching for the necessary conditions for state-formation, have highlighted these conditions. The case of the politicide of Palestine has proven to be particularly informative, since it allowed examining how state establishment is sabotaged when formal conditions for independence are ripe.

Thus, in this paper I have aimed to demonstrate how thinking through the concept of politicide may be instrumental in political analysis, and how it aids us in understanding the spatial and temporal orientations of configurations of rulership and domination over populations entangled in political struggles. This analysis has also highlighted the intricate ways in which the discursive formations of politicide may intertwine with implemented policies of politicide. To the extent that this concept of politicide appeared in literature, it was mostly articulated as being carried out through the use of direct violence. Yet, the analysis I have offered here has demonstrated that politicide can also be manifested through a broad range of forms of control that intertwine enabling and prohibiting processes simultaneously, processes which combine facilitation and strangulation, identity-formation and the creation of schisms, processes which range beyond the use of direct violence for destruction and annihilation. The overemphasis on the role of direct violence in understanding politicide also over-simplifies the spatial analysis it entails, and may downplay some of the complexities that are part and parcel of the spatiality of politicide. Politicide as it is carried out by use of governmentalizing as well as administrative means implies a more complex analysis of its spatial implementations. The manifestations of processes of governmentality reshape space and its uses for particular groups in subtle and complex ways. Thus, seeing the more intricate

ways this kind of analysis entails, expands our understanding of how the production of particular types of spatialities are integral to state-formation, or, by contrary, for committing politicide by preventing such formations to take place.

NOTES

1. Maintaining Israel's strategic advantage over all other armies in the Middle East has been underlying US-Israel relations in general, and US military assistance to Israel in particular, since the early 1980s Hadar, L. T. (1991) *Quagmire: America in the Middle East*. Washington: Cato Institute.

2. For instance, in response to the UN Secretary-General criticism of yet another expansion of the settlements by Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated in January 2016 that "The words of the secretary-general only bolster terrorism. There is no justification for terrorism, period. The Palestinian murderers do not want to build a state. They want to destroy a state. And they declare it publicly." Goodman, A. (2016) "The Settlers": New Film Reveals History & Consequences of Israeli Settlements on Palestinian Land, *Democracy Now*. 28 January 2016 [Online]. Available online: <http://m.democracynow.org/stories/15907>, [Accessed 29 May 2016].

3. As a highly charged political issue, reliable demographic data accurately reflecting the number of Jews and Palestinians living in historical Palestine is hard to come by. Without trying to resolve this dispute, the figures provided by the geo-demographer Arnon Soffer dominate the Israeli discourse and are also almost unanimously accepted among the mainstream Israeli political elite. Soffer, who draws his figures from the research of Sergio della Pergola claim that as of 2014 the population of historical Palestine was composed of 51% Jews and 49% Muslims, and that given the higher birthrates of the Palestinians, these proportions will tip in favor of the Muslims by the

end of the decade Canetti, N. (2015) A Biational State: A Disaster or Perhaps a Solution. *Liberal*, 9.

4. Famously, to overcome this almost hermetic spatial control the Gazans have developed an elaborated system of tunnels mainly for commercial usages, but some also for military purposes. For a full analysis of the role of these tunnels in sustaining the Israeli-dictated status-quo Amir, M. (Forthcoming) Productive Failures: Making Sense of Israel's Policies in the Gaza Strip.

5. Very generally, Israel has been exercising a policy of politicide also through the defragmentation of the Palestinian political community. These policies dissect the Palestinian people into five major groups. This separation is not only enforced geographically (by borders, walls, checkpoints, and limitations on movement), but also by differentiations in the civic statuses. Thus, effectively, the Palestinians are divided into the West Bankers (who are subject of Israeli military rule and of the Palestinian Authority), the Gazans (who are subjects of Israeli military rule and the Hamas), East Jerusalemites (who are holders of an Israeli residency), the Palestinians living inside the 1949 borders of Israel (who have Israeli citizenship), and the Palestinian diaspora (who have none of the above). Israeli control of Palestinian registry fixates these categories, as Israel makes any attempt to transition between these different categories, which sometimes even divide nuclear families, either extremely difficult or completely impossible Jamal, A. (2002) Beyond "Ethnic Democracy": State Structure, Multicultural Conflict and Differentiated Citizenship in Israel. *New Political Science*, 24(3), 411-431, Nikfar, B. M. (2005) Families Divided: An Analysis of Israel's Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law. *Nw. Univ. J. Int'l Hum. Rts.*, 3, 1-20, Loewenstein, J. (2006) Identity and movement control in the OPT. *Forced Migration*, 26, 24-26, Amir, M. (2011) On the Border of Indeterminacy: The Separation Wall in

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